

AGE IS NO EXCUSE!

Today's text: 2 Kings Chaps. 22-23

Extracts:

1. ***“Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. ...And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left” [2 Kgs 22: 1-2]***
2. ***“And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses, neither after him arose there any like him” [2 Kgs 23: 25]***

*Under US laws (as in most other countries), a **juvenile** is a youth under the age of 18. S(he) is under the supervision of parents (or guardians) and does not as yet have the right to vote. According to the latest (2000) Population Census, juveniles constitute 32.6% of the population. With a few exceptions, juveniles enjoy legal protections. For example, when they commit crimes, their names or pictures are hardly printed, and if found guilty, a majority are sent to correctional facilities. In spite of such privileges, statistics published by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), based on reports from law enforcement agencies, show that juveniles account for 17% of all arrests, and those in the age bracket, 15-17, make up 68% of all youth arrests whose offences are mainly DUI (drinking under the influence of alcohol) (97%) and embezzlement (94%). For youths under 15, arson (67%) and sex-related offences other than rape and prostitution (51%) are the major offences.¹*

Youths get away with so much under the guise that they are not yet matured enough to understand what they are doing. They need to grow up before we can put so many responsibilities on them. Yet by the age of 18, some of them are already parents. So, where is the dividing line between “still learning” and “matured”?

Neither the law nor today's social values can answer that question. We may have to go to the word of God for the answer. In today's story, an eight-year old kid was made king over Judah, and his performance was rated as better than that of past kings, such as his great-great grandfather David (who came to the throne at the age of 30!) and the kings who came after him. What made it possible for such a kid to achieve so much more than his elders? What lessons should we learn from him to assist us in raising our own children? These are the key issues discussed in today's lesson.

¹ “Juvenile Crime,” http://www.juvenilejusticefyi.com/juvenile_crimes.html

1. Who are you?

When you tell your spouse, “I love you with all my *heart*,” do you mean the *physical* heart that pumps blood? I doubt that because, according to scriptures, “a wise man’s heart is at his right hand but a fool’s heart at his left” [Eccl. 10: 2]. The physical heart is on the left side of the chest, and you are not being foolish to profess your love to your spouse! A wise heart must be on the right side, which we can only accept by faith. It can only be spiritual because wisdom and faith are gifts of the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 12: 8, 9]. Therefore, you are referring to your *spiritual* heart.

From that simple illustration, we see that a human being is both *physical* and *spiritual*. Of all the creatures made by God, only the human being was made in His image and likeness [Gen. 1: 26], “and the Lord God formed man *of the dust of the ground* {the physical man} and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and he became *a living soul* {the spiritual man}” [Gen. 2: 7].

a) *The physical being*

Scientists have searched in vain for life on other planets. Their failure continues to reinforce the word of God that He made the earth a dwelling place [Ps. 24: 1]. To make that possible, He made the earth a circle [Is. 40: 22], such that the “lights in the firmament in the heaven” (sun, moon and stars) can reach all parts “for signs and for seasons and for days and years” [Gen. 1: 14]. Therefore, without a physical body, *nobody/nothing* can thrive on the earth. When Emmanuel (God among us) came into the world, He had to come in flesh as Jesus Christ [Is. 7: 14; Matt. 1: 21-23].

As a physical being, we pass through a maturation process. First, after conception, we spend an average of nine months in mother’s womb. From the day that we are born, they start counting our ages. They give us our names, to differentiate one baby from another. We learn to crawl and walk and later run. Our limbs and organs grow to make it possible for us to carry our growing body weight and functions. By the age of three-five, our parents are already thinking of nursery schools for us. From there, we go on to primary school and by the age of ten-eleven, we are into secondary schools. The secondary school period coincides with the onset of puberty when our sexual organs mature to radically differentiate the boys from the girls. By age 18, we are getting into college/university and independence from parental control.

All the while, we are bombarded with challenging tasks to be mastered: table manners, rules of acceptable conduct (cultural and religious), domestic and schoolwork, etc. When we leave home for school, we come under peer influence for good or bad. Television beams its cultural values

at us also for good or bad. By the time that we are 25, our physical body organs stop growing and we are said to be physically matured.

But is that all we are? Animals and other species on earth also pass through their maturation process even though it is not as laborious as that of human beings. For example, turtles come to Trinidad every year to lay their eggs and bury them in the huge sands along the coasts. The mothers go back to far away places in North Africa and Europe. When the eggs hatch, the baby turtles find their way back to rejoin their mothers! How do they know their way? It is by instinct (an in-born radar, such as thirst, hunger, sexual appetite, etc.). Our emotional characteristics are mature at birth. They do not grow! In human beings, we only try to train them. That is the basis for the socialization process so that we do not “behave like animals!” In other words, we do not train the physical body *per se*. Instead, we train the physical body to control our emotions! We may have a natural appetite for sex right from infancy, but we are trained to exercise it *legitimately* and *decently*. For example, we are taught to have sexual relations only with our spouses (marriage) but not with siblings or parents (incest) or by force (rape) or with others (fornication, adultery, homosexuality). Certainly, these rules come from a different world than the physical one.

b) *The spiritual being*

The “living soul” that God put into physical Adam was certainly not earthly but heavenly. When Jesus Christ told His disciples, “I beheld Satan as lighting fall from heaven” [Lk 10: 18], He was only about 31 years old. Yet, the event that He was talking about happened before the creation of Adam [Rev. 12: 7-9; Gen. 3: 1-15]. God told Jeremiah, “before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” [Jer. 1: 5]. So, a great deal of who we are was determined long before we were conceived in our mothers’ wombs. A whole year before Isaac was born, God told Abraham, his would-be father, “Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed, and thou shalt call his name Isaac; and *I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him*” [Gen. 17: 19].

What does that imply? It means that *for each of us*, God had concluded before we were conceived how we would glorify Him. He also gave us the free will to fulfil or frustrate His plans for us. However, He will visit “the iniquity of the fathers upon the children *unto the third or fourth generation after them*” that hate Him and show “*mercy unto thousands of them*” that love Him and keep His commandments [Ex. 20: 5-6]. In other words, the so-called generational curse will only affect the *disobedient members* since God has also promised that “all souls are Mine; as the soul of the

father, so also the soul of the son is Mine; the soul that sinneth, it shall die” [Ezek. 18: 4].

What do we see around us today? A survey by a New York-based nonprofit organization, Public Agenda, has shown that rudeness is getting worse in America. Seventy-nine percent of the 2,013 adults surveyed by the research group said “lack of respect and courtesy in American society is a serious problem” and 69% “believe things have gotten worse in recent years.”² Social pressures, such as television, automobiles, suburbanization, among others, have led to a breakdown in community organizations, leading to more and more social isolation and producing extreme selfishness, rebellion against parental advice or established norms, and irreligiousness. This trend is infecting every country around the world, especially in the face of ICT (information and communication technology)-driven globalization. Yet, in spite of such bad news, we do have examples of young people showing more respect and behaving wisely all around us. In many countries around the world, there is a new fervour for the word of God among youths.

One conclusion is clear. Age has nothing to do with it! Those who want to fear God and obey His commandments will do so *at any age*. The story of king Josiah of Judah will make this clearer.

2. Josiah becomes king at 8!

Josiah was the son of Amon [2 Kgs 21: 25-26], the grandson of Manasseh [v. 18] and the great grandson of Hezekiah [2 Kgs 20: 21]. Hezekiah became the king of Judah at the age of 25 and reigned for 29 years [v. 2]. You will recall that in the 14th year of his reign, he fell ill. God sent the prophet Isaiah to tell him to get ready to die. He prayed for an extension of his life. God answered his prayer and granted him 15 years more [vv. 1-6]. Unfortunately, after he had recovered, he did what was wrong in the sight of God by ostentatiously exposing his wealth to visitors from Babylon. God cursed him in the following words, “behold, the days come that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left... And *of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon*” [vv. 16-18].

See how the curse began to play itself out. When Hezekiah died at the age of 54, the son that was available to succeed him, Manasseh, was only 12 years old [2 Kgs 21: 1]! Manasseh was so wicked that “he made his sons pass through the fire, and observed times and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards” [v. 6]. God was patient with him, allowing him to rule for 55 years [v. 1] but he did not change. Instead, he provoked God the more by shedding innocent

² “Survey finds rudeness is getting worse,” <http://cnn.com/2002/US/04/02/rude.americans/index.html>

blood “till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another” [v. 16]. His son, Amon, who succeeded him at the age of 22, was not any better [2 Kgs 21: 19]. He was so bad that after only two years’ reign, his servants conspired and murdered him [vv. 19, 23]. That was what brought his 8-year old son, Josiah, to the throne [2 Kgs 22: 1].

This little child broke away from the evil path of his ancestors to the extent that there was no king before and after him “that turned to the Lord with *all his heart* and with *all his soul* and with *all his might*” [2 Kgs 23: 25]. What made it possible for this youngster to succeed where his elders had failed? Here are the leading indicators:

a) *God called him to be king*

You will recall that after the death of Solomon, Israel was broken into the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, reigned in Judah while Solomon’s servant, Jeroboam, ruled the larger kingdom of Israel [1 Kgs Chaps. 11-12]. Jeroboam built an altar in Bethel to rival the one in Jerusalem and appointed priests from among “the lowest of the people which were not of the sons of Levi” [12: 25-32]. God sent a young prophet from Judah to warn the evil king about things to come.

The young prophet stood by the altar built by Jeroboam and cried, “O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord: Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, *Josiah by name*; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men’s bones shall be burnt upon thee” [1 Kgs 13: 1-2]. Over 300 years later, a child called Josiah in deed ascended the throne of David in Judah. So, long before he was born, God had marked out Josiah to rule as king for His own purpose.

b) *His mother raised him in the fear of the Lord*

If Josiah’s father, Amon, was 14 when he was born, his mother, Jedida, could not have been older. If his father was so evil, then he could not have been the one that taught his son about God. Therefore, it makes sense to give a good deal of the credit to his teenage mother whose lineage was traced to Boscath (or Bozkath) of the tribe of Judah that came with Joshua into the Promised Land [Josh. 15: 39].

She trained her son to fear God and not to depart from His ways *and Josiah obeyed her* [Prov. 22: 6]. At the age of 16 (i.e., the 8th year of his reign), Josiah “began to seek after the God of David his father” [2 Chron. 34: 3]. At age 20, he declared war on the people’s idolatrous worship and pulled down groves and altars and ground graven images “into powder” throughout “all the land of Israel” [vv. 3-7].

How many parents of 20-year olds can boast of that kind of response to their parents' upbringing? Today, Josiah's age mates are into drugs or prostitution and rebellion against parents trying to talk the word of God to them. The families of the people of God are not spared either!

c) *Josiah repaired the temple and resumed true worship there*

At the age of 26, Josiah sent his top administrators and priests to go and repair the temple built by Solomon. There was so much transparency and trust between Josiah's team and the workmen "because they dealt faithfully" [2 Kgs 22: 3-7]. It was while they were working that Hilkiah the high priest found the book of the law [the Holy Bible of the time]. After it had been read to his hearing, Josiah tore his clothes, a measure of repentance [vv. 8-11]. He quickly ordered his men to go to a prophetess to seek the Lord's face. Through her, God commended the young king "because thine heart was tender and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord." He would die in peace so that "thine eye shall not see the evil which I will bring upon this place" [vv. 12-20]

d) *Josiah's blessings did not extend to his successors!*

Josiah died at the age of 39. His 23-year old son, Jehoahaz, lasted only three months on the throne! He did evil in God's sight. The Egyptians threw him out and put his brother, Eliakim (who later changed his name to Jehoiakim), a puppet that allowed the Pharaoh to exploit and appropriate the tribute of silver and gold due to Israel [2 Kgs 23: 30-37]. Not quite long thereafter, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, came and sacked the place and carried all the material and human talents of Israel into exile in Babylon, as the Lord had told Hezekiah hundreds of years earlier [2 Kgs 24: 1-16]. The soul that sins shall die!

3. Conclusion: Lessons

Josiah was right with God. Yet, he raised a wicked son who was like his own father (Amon). Amon came to the throne at 22 and his grandson at 23. Yet, Josiah who became king at 8 was better than both of them. The lesson of it all is that age and parentage have nothing to do with it. As a parent, your duty is to bring up your children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" [Eph. 6: 4]. If they obey, they will receive their blessings in accordance with God's plan for them, including long life [v. 2]. However, if they rebel and turn away from God all in the name of freedom and modernity, there is not much that you can do. Like the father of the Prodigal Son, you can pray and wait and hope that they will return to God. However, if such children think that they have time on their hands, on account of age, they are joking because they themselves will soon become parents! What will they pass on to their children?

Time is running out. Age is no excuse!